

From Simon to Peter #07 - Called to Be Fishers of Men

by J. Glyn Owen

To be a fisher of men means to take people out of their sinful state and convey them to a new kingdom through the gospel message, and this requires a correct view of Jesus as the Messiah.

Duration: 27:59

Scripture: Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew 6:33, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11, Acts 16:6-10

Topics: "Simon to Peter"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the theme of Simon being called to be a fisher of men. He refers to the incident recorded in Luke chapter 5, where Jesus teaches the people from Simon's boat and then instructs Simon to do what he tells him. The preacher emphasizes that as fallen humans, we often struggle to do what God tells us to do. He also highlights the pressure and urgency of the situation, with the multitudes pressing upon Jesus and Simon being driven towards the water. The sermon emphasizes the timing and providence of the situation, as Jesus comes down to the lakeside where Simon and his friends are cleaning their nets.

Transcript

And this morning to our theme in these morning services, from Simon to Peter. And we come now to the episodes which we find in the three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, that refer to the summons of our Lord to Simon and his fellows to become fishers of men. You will find the relative material in Matthew 4, verses 18-22, Mark 1, verses 16-20 and in Luke 5, verses 1-11.

Now let's get the setting. You remember that Simon, the subject of our present study, was included among a small nucleus of people who were introduced to our theme from Simon to Peter. We come to pursue the aspect of the subject that was introduced last Lord's Day morning, called to be a fisher of men.

Having already considered this theme then, as it is unfolded in the earlier incident that took place in our Lord's ministry, recorded by Matthew and Mark, we turn today to Luke's exclusive account of another incident in which the same theme occupied the teaching of our Lord and was expounded by him to his disciples. Now this you'll find in our reading in Luke 5, verses 1-11. We shall not read the passage now, for I think it is fairly familiar and I trust it's fresh in all our minds this morning.

The metaphor employed here is most suggestive, most graphic, as we saw last Sunday morning. The task to which Simon, along with others and along with ourselves, was called by our Lord is a task in which, according to him, mankind are lost in a sea of sin and death. Now have we seen men in this plight? Like fish in the sea, in an element from which they cannot get out, but in which they can simply go around in circles at various levels.

Mankind are like fish in an ocean, lost and incapable of extricating themselves from the sand. And our task is to become fishers of men, by God's good hand. We are to be his fishermen, to take men out of that element, and by the lift of the gospel message of the Spirit of God to convey them and transform them and translate them into another kingdom, into another territory, into another element altogether.

This is the graphic way of describing the task to which Simon was called and those with him, into which you Christian and I am called today. It is to be fishers of men. It is no wonder, therefore, that the training for such a high calling is correspondingly exacting.

It involves every prospective fisher of men in following after the one who went to his cross to die in order to rise again and to ascend the throne of God. It is to follow in the footsteps of him that was going into the teeth of the fray that he knew was going to crucify him, following after him. Fishermen, you must leave your fish and become a fisher of men.

To become a fisher of men you must follow in the footsteps of the master man-fisher. And to do that will mean suffering, loneliness, deprivation maybe, and a sure cross, but this is the call. You don't become a fisher of men by just attending a course on man-fishing.

You don't become a fisher of men by coming to a class which teaches you in personal evangelism or any other kind of evangelism. This is one of the sad things in the church of Jesus Christ. There are multitudes of men and women who have been to classes galore on personal counseling and personal evangelism and they've never caught a fish.

You know why? We become fishers of men, says Jesus, by following him, following him. And we can bask in the truths and the doctrines of the New Testament relating to the task of man-fishing without taking one solitary step out onto the side of the lake following him where he goes. But you say to me this morning, I'm not sure where Jesus is going these days.

Well, I can tell you where he's going and I have not the shadow of a doubt for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. And ere he ascended to the Father, he said to his disciples, Go ye and make disciples of all nations. And he ended that by saying, Lo, I am with you who go.

That's what he is. The way of his goings are determined in Scripture. Make no mistake about this.

And if you're on that path, you're on his wavelength and you're on his way, but make sure that you keep close to him. The task, becoming fishers of men. The training, it is exacting and it is delicate.

As delicate as the task is intricate. Because it means that we must learn to follow our Lord. Not simply to go on bungling in our own sweet way, but it means that we need to know our Master's voice.

To sense the movements of his Spirit. Do you remember last Sunday evening for example? Now this is off the beaten track in a sense, but it is relevant too. Last Sunday evening we were discussing the founding of the church in Philippi.

Did you notice at the beginning of Acts chapter 16 how the Apostle Paul and those with him, they were forbidden to preach the Holy Ghost in one place, and they were forbidden to preach the Gospel in another place, and they were brought exactly to Philippi. Now one place where they were forbidden to go and preach the Gospel was in Asia. You say, this is terrible.

Doesn't the Lord want Asiatics to be saved? Yes. But there was an Asiatic woman waiting in Philippi who was the key to Asia, and her name was Lydia. And the Lord's way to Asia was via Lydia's household and Lydia's testimony.

And Simon, I'm sorry, Saul of Tarsus that was, Paul now, was sensitive to the movements of the Spirit of God. You see, he was following close on to his master's foot marks. Therefore he knew the way.

Now this is the training then. Difficult? Yes. But this morning we turn from the task and the training to the token of success that is given here in Luke chapter 5 verses 1 to 11.

This incident reflects a stage in our Lord's public ministry when he is now beginning, may I emphasize the word beginning, beginning to be popular. He is beginning to gather the crowds and we find that they are very much here as we shall see in a moment. Now there are three things I want to say about this particular incident.

I want us to look at the timing of the token that was given, then the test that preceded the timing and necessarily so, and finally the truth conveyed by means of a token. First of all, the timing of the token that was given. Now apart from the general factor which we've just noted, there would appear to be at least two important matters relating to the timing of our Lord's giving of this great token in the catch of fish when the fishermen had failed to catch anything the night before.

The first is this, the apparent spiritual failure of the preceding day. Now please don't let us miss this. If we miss this, we miss the whole thrust of the passage and of this very important lesson.

Let me go back just a little. Upon the arrival of Jesus and his followers up in Galilee in the north, it would appear that Jesus dismissed the little band and sent them home to their families and to their friends. The very natural thing to do when they've been down probably in the feast in Jerusalem over a period, and then they've been delayed with our Lord and they've been seeing the incidents recorded in John 1 to 4. Having arrived up north in Galilee then, it would appear that Jesus sent them back.

Back, Simon, to take care of his wife and mother-in-law who lived with him and whether he had children or not, we don't know, and so with the others. Then our Lord was out one day by the Sea of Galilee and he saw them fishing, Simon and Andrew, James and John. And he called them as we saw last time.

He said, Now look, he said, time for fishing is over. Come after me and I will make you to become officials of men. And immediately they left everything and they followed him.

Their response was decisive and wholehearted. But let me hasten to add it was long, it was short-lived. Not long-lived but short-lived.

Something happened. Now, the Scriptures don't tell us and when the Scriptures are silent it's very dangerous for us to say too much. But something happened.

And yet don't we all know the kind of things that happen when the Lord Jesus Christ has called us to a specific task? Do we need really to probe or try to probe into the details that characterize the lives of these people? I don't think we do. You know it and I know it. The kind of thing that intrude into our lives when Christ has called us to something very definite.

Friends and foes seem to unite as in a whole massive array to stand in the way the enticements of the world, the desire for this and the lust for that. Many a Christian life knows what it is for lust to come to life when God calls. I have counseled many, many men and women who never knew the power of lust until God called them to do something.

And the love of ease and the love of pleasure. They never knew they had it until He called. But when He called the whole thing came to life again.

And they knew what sin was and what Satan was and what it was to have enmity not only in their foes but in their homes. Now we have no clear evidence of precisely what happened to these people but the thing that is important is this. They went back to their boats again.

Called as Matthew tells us in chapter 4 and Mark tells us in chapter 1 and they left everything to follow Him. After a little while, I don't know how long, a few weeks probably, they went back to the boat and they were there for some time. But suffice it now to note that Jesus Christ who called them did not leave them there.

And this of course is the thrilling note that will run throughout the whole life of Simon Peter. He who calls his people pursues them when they go astray and woos them back again into his way and into his will and will summons them and will use this and that to bring them back. And so he does here with Peter.

Fickle that Simon was, floundering that he was, our Lord Jesus Christ will seek him and bring him back again into the way and will even give him a token of ultimate success when he is a total failure. You know this is wonderful. The apparent spiritual failure then of preceding days resulting in a return to the old secular ways from which Jesus had decisively called him and called his fellows.

The other thing to notice by way of the timing of the token is this. The evident material failure of the preceding night. Now whatever success they may have experienced at their fishing during the intervening days since they turned their backs on the Lord Jesus and went back to their boats.

The night before this incident was disastrous. Experienced fishermen though they were fishing in the most familiar waters. They knew every inch of the Sea of Galilee the Lake of Gennesaret as it is called here one and the same.

They knew every inch of it. They'd lived here they were brought up here they knew it all and they go out into the familiar waters with all their acumen all their ability all their experience and that night they caught nothing. Says Simon in verse 5 we have toiled all night and we've taken nothing.

The fish kept strangely at bay. Now get the picture. Add those two things together let's make a total let's strike a total.

The apparent spiritual failure of recent days the obviously material failure of the previous night what does it all mount up to this? In the heart of these men there must have been some feeling such as this that the whole world has turned against them since they came to know the Lord Jesus. It's also difficult to obey him

and to do what he asks and yet when they turn back to their secular vocations here they are involved in fishing and they can make nothing of it. The whole world has turned against them.

So much for the timing of the token about which we are going to see in a moment. Now come in the second place and notice the test that preceded the divinely timed token. With Simon and his friends retreating from Jesus retreating from training to become fishers of men.

A very remarkable providence can I put it like that? A very remarkable providence arranges that Jesus should be coming down again by the lakeside. Simon and his fellows are out there with a boat. The boat is empty they are cleaning their nets but now there is a difference.

It's not only Jesus and the disciples and the boat but there is a whole concourse of people pressing upon our Lord Jesus Christ. It's very difficult to convey this but the word press perhaps is the best. There is the pressure of the multitudes driving him in towards the sea towards the water.

Can you not envisage people not simply jostling around him but pushing him. They want to hear something or they want to see a miracle. Whatever they wanted they are pressing hard upon him and he is driven.

He is driven. That's the picture. He is driven to the edge of the water and so much so when he sees these two empty boats here he says to Simon who owned one of them Simon he says let me get into the boat and take out a little so that I can use your boat to preach to these people.

Now think again. Here are these fishermen who have been called to be fishers of men running away from duty. Going back to their secular vocation to catch fish in the sea of Galilee and though the sea of Galilee was full of fish they could catch no fish whilst the human fish are clamoring to be caught.

The human fish are multiplying. They are all there. They are gathering around our Lord.

They are jostling around him. They are waiting to be taught. They are waiting to be led.

May I say so reverently they are waiting to be caught in the net of the gospel and Jesus is alone and single-handed. The fish that they were accustomed to catching they can no longer catch. But the human fish are eager to be caught and Jesus has only two hands and two lips.

One mouth. The spectacle of the needy multitudes. The sound of the master's voice and the substance of his speech must have prepared Simon somewhat for what was to come.

Concluding his discourse our Lord then turns to Simon having taught the people out of his little boat. He turns to Simon and he says now Simon he says do what I tell you. Now you don't find that exactly in the scriptures but that's the significance of it.

Simon he says do what I tell you. You see this is the one thing that we human people don't like to do in our fallen condition. We don't like to do what God tells us to do.

Simon says the master do what I tell you. I want you to move out. And I want you to do something just as I tell you.

Now let me interject here. What our Lord is after is this. He has called these people and he has called Simon in particular to become a fisher of men.

They failed already. But our master wants to qualify and clarify one thing. Namely Simon's view of himself.

I wonder how I can say this without being misunderstood but I'm going to put it in a very blathery way. You know Jesus Christ can put up with almost any blunder in a Christian man or a Christian woman provided in the depths of our souls we have the right view of him. Now that can be misunderstood.

And I ought to take two Sunday mornings to qualify it and confirm it. But I want you to see what happens now. The one thing our master our Lord wants to know is this Simon who do you think I am? He doesn't say it like that but he wants Simon not to reply in words.

Words can be very glib. But he wants Simon to show what he thinks of him who has called him. And on the basis of that our Lord will come and give him if he passes the test to give him a token of unquestioned success.

Now let's look at it. Already seated in Simon's boat then Jesus issued the command that was a tacit claim to control Simon's boat and Simon's time his possessions and his programs says Jesus to him Simon launch out into the depths and let down your nets for a draft, for a catch, for a show. But the boat is not his to command.

The boat is Simon's. Who is this person that comes into Simon's boat and tells him where to go and what to do? He is the one from whom Simon has retreated abandoned rejected in a sense for a while Simon had been washing his nets as we have seen and yet our Lord our Lord commands the rightful owner of that boat and of those nets to go out into the deep and to do just exactly what he is told. Now let me point out again let me get this you see what the Lord Jesus is after is this it's the view that Simon still holds of his person.

Who is this person that is commanding me? Who's telling me what to do? Who's telling me what to do with my own with my own tackle and with my own boat? Who's telling me where to go? If he is a fisherman I'm sorry if he is a mere carpenter coming to tell a fisherman in a trade that is altogether unknown to him well he's a bungler and he needs to be told off. Is he that? Is he just an intruder somebody that likes to have his fingers in other people's pies? What right has he? Now you wait in a moment it will come out. That Jesus assumes to have a right to control that boat those nets Simon's time and he tells him so.

Simon launch out I want your boat I want your nets do as I tell you. Look again the command was no mere claim to Simon's possessions and program it also implied his authority over Simon's natural wisdom and personal will. When Jesus commanded push out now into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch he was challenging Simon's wisdom as a fisherman.

You see Simon had no plan to fish just then. Why? Because he was a good fisherman. And fishermen did not fish in the day or very rarely did and if they did it was with a line with a line and a hook.

Jesus tells this man to go out in the day not in the night when as his experience says it is absolutely hopeless. And yet Jesus bids him to go against his own native wisdom as a fisherman do what Jesus is telling him. Now the question is this what do you know about it? Who are you to tell me how to fish? What is your experience in fishing? Who are you anyway? Do you know anything about this lake? And do you know anything about fishing at all? What right have you to tell me what to do? Can I repeat? Is this but a bungling carpenter who wants to intrude in other men's business? If so we'll understand Simon Peter giving him a cold shoulder and an explanation.

And Simon's explanations would not have had much jam on them. But my dear friends come with me and see Simon pass the test. Oh the grace of God despite the failure you see there's something there.

Grace has begun to work. Now what is it? Says Simon Master he says and the word for master is quite a strong one. Master he says we've toiled all night and caught nothing nevertheless.

Oh my dear people can you see what's happening here? Simon says we've toiled all night our experience is hopeless. We know the lake and we know the habits of the fish and we've got nothing. We put our best into it we've got nothing.

You tell us now to go out. Nevertheless he says despite our failure if you say so I'll put down the nets. Oh this is precious.

You see what it reveals is this Simon saw in Jesus more than a mere carpenter from Nazareth. More than a mere pharisaic teacher. More than a rabbi that was purely human.

He saw him he saw him dare I say it he saw him as the Messiah. He saw God incarnate here. Now let me say there will be theologians present who will probably quit me for this.

I'm not wanting to suggest that Peter's Christology has come to full bloom. But I do mean to say this that Simon knew that here was someone who was above the human and what can you have above the human but the Messiah of whom Peter has been hearing in the previous chapters in John 1 to 4 the previous episode. Grace has triumphed.

And Simon launches out into the deep lets down the net and this brings us to the token and the truth that it taught.

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